

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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GRETCHEN.

By the Author of "Dame Durden," "My Lord Conceit,"
"Darby and Joan," "Corinna," etc.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I. IN THE TOILS.

ADRIAN LYLE went home to his lodgings and wrote a note to the Rector, stating that important business called him away for a day.

The first train by which he could reach Leawoods left at six in the morning; there was nothing to do but wait.

He threw himself down on the couch, but sleep was impossible. He was tormented by the image of Gretchen's face; the thought that even now she might be suffering all the tortures of betrayal. It was nothing short of agony to him to picture her under the first shock and horror of this revelation; for he never doubted but that Neale Kenyon had written to her.

As he recalled the night when the young man had given him that assurance of his honesty, he felt furious with himself for his ready credence. The searching light of the present revealed only too plainly the blackness of the past.

All through the dreary hours he lay there fighting with conflicting emotions, a prey to such remorse and agony as assuredly would never have troubled Kenyon himself.

It was a relief when day broke, and he had some excuse for movement and occupation. He bathed and changed his clothes mechanically, and lit a spirit-lamp to make himself some tea before going out in the chill, raw air. Then he walked away to the station so hurriedly and

eagerly that, as a matter of course, he had to wait twenty minutes there for his train.

It was a dreary journey, and he was faint and wearied before he arrived at the little station he so well remembered. As it boasted of no refreshment room, he got into the musty old fly which was waiting for chance visitors, and drove to the inn. He knew he should need all his strength and self-command for the task before him, and that fact gave him courage enough to delay the meeting, even against his will.

When he reached the cottage, his agitation was so great that for some time he walked up and down outside its sheltering laurels. It needed all his powers of self-command to enable him to open the gate and enter.

It seemed to him that the place had a dreary and deserted aspect. The roses and creepers were mere brown twigs trained against the windows; the warm flower scents no longer made the air sweet with a perpetual incense. Mystery and gloom shrouded it under brooding sky and shadowy woodlands, and silence intense as death seemed to hold it like a spell.

Though Adrian Lyle was not imaginative, the stillness and dreariness oppressed him with an inexplicable horror. His step made no sound on the sodden grass; the door was standing open; and, seeing no sign of bell or knocker, he entered the little dark hall.

A sound of voices reached him; involuntarily he stopped and listened. They came from a room on his left—low, suave tones that woke an answering memory, and then a cry, passionate and indignant, which set his pulses leaping, and seemed to force him like a motive power in its direction. His hand was on the door; it opened; he stood on the threshold

of a small room; the table was littered with books and papers; a wood fire burnt dully on the open hearth; and facing him—her face white as death, her eyes ablaze with wrath and indignation—stood Gretchen. Before her, his hands resting on a chair, over which he leant with insolent ease, was Bari!

It needed but a second for Adrian Lyle's eyes to take in the scene. Then—he was in the room, and at Gretchen's side, and she was clinging to his arm, sobbing like a frightened child.

"Oh—send him away!" she cried wildly. "he is so rude, so insulting—oh, how can I tell you? He has said that Neale and I were never married—that I have no right, no claim—that—oh, Mr. Lyle," she broke off wildly, "say it is not true. I was so young and so ignorant. What could I know of forms and ceremonies? You know—you met us; say it is not true. I will believe your word against a thousand oaths of his."

Clinging to him with trembling hands; looking up at him with tear-drowned eyes; her heart rent and shaken with agony; what likeness was there between this sorrow-stricken, passionate woman and the young, glad-souled creature on whom Adrian Lyle's eyes had rested with such wondering admiration that night in Venice?

Involuntarily he took her hands and held them closely, and the very touch of his seemed to bring her strength and comfort.

He turned to Bari, and something in his eyes made the crafty Italian cringe, and falter, and shrink away—so grand and kindly did his accuser look.

"You pitiful cur!" he said, holding back, as in a leash, the fierce and wrathful words which had been raging in his brain, "how dare you come here with your cowardly threats? Who sent you?"

"My master!" said Bari; but his voice faltered, and he drew nearer to the door. Even clergymen had been known to be violent under provocation.

"Your—master!" dropped slowly from Adrian Lyle's white lips. "I don't believe it."

"He has a letter from Neale; he showed it me," sobbed Gretchen; "but I don't, I can't believe it. How could he marry his cousin, when I am his wife already?"

Adrian Lyle loosed her hands and led her to the door.

"Go," he said, firmly but gently. "It is not fit that you should listen to this man's insults. Leave him to me."

Meekly as a child she obeyed. That sense of rest, and peace, and comfort, which always came to her with Adrian Lyle's presence, held her passive and content even in this hour of strained and torturing agony.

The moment the door closed he turned to Bari, and faced him with stern and unflinching eyes.

"Now," he said, "tell me the truth—if you can."

An evil smile crossed the man's lips.

"In the character of Madame's new-protector?" he said sneeringly. "She has not had to wait long."

Adrian Lyle's face grew white as death. He made one step, seized the man by the shoulders, and shook him as a dog shakes a rat.

"Another such word," he said, "and I will toss you out of the window, like the carrion you are! How dare you insult an innocent woman in my presence!"

Bari grew livid. But he was too great a coward to resent openly. His day would come, he told himself. To strike in the dark was often easier and more satisfactory.

"I only told the truth," he said. "Mr. Kenyon bade me inform this—lady"—with a mocking tone that made Adrian Lyle's blood tingle in his veins—"of his intended marriage with his cousin. Those 'breaks' are of every-day occurrence with men of the world. I suppose Monsieur knows that, even though he wears a priest's cassock?"

"Do you mean to say," demanded Adrian Lyle, "that Mr. Kenyon was not married—legally married? That all this time——?"

"Mr. Kenyon had the best intentions," said Bari, coolly. "But unfortunately the circumstances were romantic, and the legalities troublesome. Mr. Kenyon carried the young lady off from her home, and from her intended vocation—that of a nun. There was no time for ceremony of—any sort. No offence, Monsieur," as he saw the dark flush that leapt into Adrian's Lyle's face. "I am only stating plain facts."

"But the priest," muttered Adrian Lyle, "the priest who, she said, married them in Vienna?"

An evil smile crossed the man's lips. "Some form was gone through, I believe, to satisfy her. She was so eager to get away from her home and people that she was easily satisfied. But they are not legally married, and Mr. Kenyon is tired——"

"Silence," thundered Adrian Lyle. "I do not know which is the greater villain—your master or yourself. You have evidently aided him effectually in this rascality. But you have not only a defenceless woman to deal with; you shall answer to me for every deceit you have practised, for every lie you have devised. The world shall know Neale Kenyon as he is!"

"Monsieur's intentions are doubtless as wise as they are—disinterested," sneered Bari; "but he cannot undo what has been done, and he would bewiser to make the best of it. His attentions to the young lady have long ago excited Mr. Kenyon's suspicions. His presence under her roof on this and other occasions may have compromised her more than Monsieur thinks. After all, there is no need to make a great disturbance. The field is left free, and if Madame weeps a little at first, Monsieur is at hand to dry her tears, and give her spiritual consolation——"

He got no further, for Adrian Lyle seized him with a grip of iron, and the next instant he found himself lying full length on the grass plat before the door, which shut with a loud and sullen clang in his face.

Breathless and panting, Adrian Lyle stood in the little hall, and asked himself with sudden horror what he was to do?

A wall of blackness and infamy seemed closing round that pure and innocent life. He felt powerless—he too had been deceived. His heart was wrung with agony—yet all its pity and devotion could not ward off the blow that must surely fall on that young head.

"How shall I tell her?" he groaned aloud. "How—shall I tell her?"

As the words left his lips he felt the touch of a small cold hand—it drew him gently, unresistingly, into the room he had just left. A face hueless as marble looked back to his own. In all the days and hours that had brought him face to face with sorrow, and misery, and shame, he thought he had never seen any face look so piteous and so sorrow-struck as this one.

"Don't deceive me," she said in a hard, changed voice. "You at least will speak the truth. Is it quite true—what Bari said?"

"My poor child——" he faltered.

She drew back a step or two, holding out her hands as if to ward off a blow.

"Not yet," she whispered faintly. "Give

me a little time. I have not been strong lately . . . I can't bear it just yet——"

He saw a change come over the white face, the swaying figure, but he stood there fixed and immovable in his own great misery.

There was a sofa near her. She suddenly sank down upon it; and he watched her lay her face upon the crimson cushion, and cover it with her trembling hands, as though she wanted to hide it and herself from even his compassion.

"Do men often behave so?" she said at last, in the same cold and strained voice. "Bari said it was quite—usual. I am so ignorant. I did not know . . . oh, how it all comes back! The warnings, the care, the strictness. I can understand it all now . . . It was from this they wanted to save me. . . . from this . . ."

He looked for tears, he hoped for tears, but none came. She was beyond their poor relief. The stab had gone to the core and centre of her faithful heart.

"You did not guess?" she asked suddenly, dropping her hands, and looking straight at him, "you never thought but that I was his—wife?"

"He swore to me that you were," said Adrian Lyle hoarsely. "I thought there might be something not strictly legal, not quite as usual; but he said when you came to England he would make all that right, and have the ceremony performed again. Did he not do so?"

She shook her head, and once again let it fall in the same helpless fashion against the crimson cushion.

There was a moment of intense and painful silence.

"What can I do?" she said at last. He . . . he is tired of me. I can see that now—so plainly. Were I fifty times his wife, I would not force him back. What is the value of an empty heart . . . an empty form? And he wants to marry his cousin now. Bari says it will ruin his whole future if he does not."

"Do not believe Bari," interrupted Adrian Lyle, as he slowly paced to and fro the narrow room. "He is an arrant liar!"

He stopped beside her, and looked down at the quiet figure and the hidden face. For a few seconds all the room was still. When he spoke at last, his voice was low and broken with intense emotion:

"In the sight of Heaven," he said, "you are his wife. He cannot forsake you in this heartless and selfish fashion."

Then he remembered the letter Sir Roy had shown him—the words of Alexis Kenyon. Here was proof enough of perfidy. His arguments could not convince even himself—how could they convince her?

"Did he write to you?" he asked gently.

"No," she said. "Only to Bari—he showed me the letter. He has never written to me," she went on, with a little quiver in her voice, "since he went abroad. I know he is tired. Everything shows it."

"This is no mere question of a passing fancy," said Adrian Lyle sternly. "There are such things as duty and morality to be considered."

She pushed the loose and tumbled hair from off her delicate temples, and looked at him with sad and burning eyes:

"Do you think," she said, "I could hold him against his will . . . now that he does not want me? I thought his love was like my own. But it is not—it never could have been. I . . . I would not have pained him for all the world could offer. But he——" she said no more, only laid her hand upon her heart with a gesture of mute despair.

The growing pathos of the young face— young, alas! no longer with the light and radiance of the spirit within—tried to the uttermost that self-control which Adrian Lyle had set upon himself with fierce determination.

"Something must be done," he said at last. "You cannot be flung aside in this fashion. Let me appeal to his uncle on your behalf. He is a good and honourable man—he——"

"His uncle!" she interposed with sudden passion. "Her father? Tell them my pitiful story?—ask their compassion, their aid? Never! I would die first."

"But what will you do?" he urged, and the misery in his face would have touched her to the quick, had she seen it.

"I shall go home," she said piteously. "I will tell them that they were right and I was wrong. I committed a great sin, and I must bear its punishment."

"Oh, no," he cried wildly. "You shall not. The sin was not yours."

"It was mine," she said resolutely, "in the first instance. I deceived them, and I disobeyed them. I am justly punished."

He drew back. He felt as if the ache and torture of his heart must speak out, or it would stifle him. The veins in his

temples swelled like cords, his face grew ashen white.

Suddenly she looked up at him, and those deep eyes full of earnest sorrow and bitter pain startled her like a revelation.

"You have always been so good to me," she faltered. "I don't know why, but you have. I remember what you said about my needing a friend . . . but you can't help me now."

"I can," he said passionately. "And I will. Do you think I am not man enough to resent such an insult as this, to a trusting and defenceless woman? Is your life, that was so beautiful and innocent, to be flung aside in this cruel manner?"

She put out her hand as if to stay the impulsive words.

"I gave him my life," she said slowly. "It was his to do with as he pleased . . . He does not need it any longer—that is all."

Then she rose and stood for a moment there, with her hand resting on the couch as if to steady herself.

"You must leave me now," she said. "I want to be alone—to think. It is so hard to realise that all is over—for oh, I loved him so—I loved him so!"

The tears came then. She threw herself down on the couch once more in a tempest of grief, which shook all Adrian Lyle's self-control to the uttermost.

"Yes, I will leave you," he said with effort. "I can do nothing: I can only say, try to bear it—try to remember there is consolation above, far surpassing that of earth. I will come and see you to-morrow, if I may."

She did not answer, she could not frame any words. She only put out her hand, cold and trembling, and wet with her tears. He held it for a moment, looking down at her with mute anguish. Then gently, solemnly, he bent his head, and touched with cold and quivering lips those trembling fingers.

Then her hand dropped at her side once more, and a sense of stillness and deadness seemed to come over her. The paroxysm of weeping passed. She heard the sound of a closing door, the faint, dull echo of a passing step. But thought was paralysed for a time. She was only conscious of lying there, her face against the cushion, her eyes closed to the sunlight, as the brief winter's day melted into early gloom—lying there, her young life uprooted, and flung into the dust, the agony of a living death fastening with cruel fangs upon her heart.

ALONG THE ADRIATIC.*

PART II. LORETO AND RECANATI.

WE left Brindisi on the following day, by the afternoon train. The weather was inspiring, and the country showed at its best. But until the sun went down, our train dragged its tedious way through miles of scenery as different from the conventional idea of Italian landscape as can be imagined. Of mountains or hills there was not a vestige; but, instead, vast malarious flats, with bright-green grass and grain in the foreground broken by occasional vineyards in the purple earth, and with the steel-blue horizon-line thirty or forty miles away. Here and there the broad plain was set with a single olive or almond tree; or a ramshackle hut of boughs, perhaps buttressed against a tree trunk, which in summer may throw a shelter of leaves over it; or a solitary husbandman in blue, with a shining adze on his shoulder; or a group of milk-white oxen. And when the sunset colours dyed this infinite stretch of country crimson and gray, and seemed to throw every blade of grass or stalk of wheat into strong relief, one could not but confess that there is nothing under the sun without a peculiar beauty of its own, which may at times vie with any other kind of beauty.

But oh! the weariness of this Italian express! At no time did it run faster than twenty miles an hour, and at every little wayside station it lingered until the guards and engine-men had talked all the news of the day with the authorities and the two gaily-dressed gens-d'armes who invariably stand to arms on the platform as the train draws to a halt. Before the night came upon us we had passed but two places of importance; and at one or other of them we had to follow Italian custom and lay in provision of sausage and bread, figs, and raisins, and a few flasks of wine in rush-covered bottles, that we might not go supperless to sleep.

For a few miles this evening we had a companion who supplied us with a little entertainment. He was an Italian gentleman, travelling from one small station to another. In his dress he was almost more of a dandy than seemed to be consonant with good taste. His boots were very small, with high heels, cut low to show

his green silk stockings; his trousers were of maroon velvet, so tight that he had to sit down with infinite precaution; his vest, studded with onyx buttons, was strung to and fro with gold chains, among which clanked the rim of the gold-mounted eye-glasses, which he set upon his nose and discarded every other minute; and upon his head he wore a natty little Tyrolese hat of green felt, with a tall feather in it.

And what do you think he travelled with for company's sake? Nothing less than a large black cat, which he brought into the carriage in a common canvas bag. For a moment or two puss was kept in struggling confinement; but when the train had started, and the windows were safely closed, the gentleman peeped in at his pet, and in a moment puss had leaped from the opening and was purring loudly, with tail erect, while she stepped from one shoulder of her master to the other. It was curious to see how the temper of this gentleman was quite at the mercy of the cat. You would expect that a man of forty-five or so would have his whims and inclinations well under the command of his reason. But it was not so. In an unwary moment puss stepped from the broadcloth of her master's coat between her master's collar and his skin. A scratch was the consequence. Hereupon the man grew carmine, ejaculated angrily, tore the cat from her place of vantage, held her with one hand by the scruff of the neck, and with the other white jewelled hand belaboured her until her squeals made us interfere on her behalf. Then, with many bows and apologies, the Italian gentleman consented to forgive the cat; in token of which forgiveness, he took the battered and aching body of his favourite into his arms and pressed it fondly to his bosom, the tail of the cat in the meanwhile sweeping with angry curves across his face. He kissed puss on the nose, stroked her, tickled her on the back, and with other such fond cajoleries, won her confidence again. But, ere the queer pair left us, there was another furious outbreak, and for one dreadful half minute, the man and his cat fought with each other tooth and nail, and we were deafened with the noise of a menagerie.

Eventually puss was coaxed into her sack, the string of which was drawn tight, and, wishing us a cordial good-night, the Italian gentleman transported his struggling friend to the platform. There was a spot

* See ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, vol. xl., p. 520.

of blood on his nose, however, which did not improve his well-preserved beauty.

All through the night we ran along the shore of the Adriatic. Inland, we passed the heights of the Apennines—Majella and the Gran Sasso, the latter being the king of the chain, and nearly ten thousand feet high. But the play of the moonlight on the smooth waters of the sea was better worth seeing than these great mountain-shapes, which are more often than not so wrapped round with heavy white clouds that none but close students of Nature can say where the snow ends and the clouds begin.

We were nearing Ancona, and in the fourteenth hour of our long sitting from Brindisi, when the day began to break. What a sight it was, to be sure! The moon was shining quietly upon the Adriatic, and upon a strata of still cloud-shapes that brooded over the sea. It was as if we looked upon a lagoon set with silver islands. Then, suddenly almost, the silvery radiance was transfused with a coral glow. This deepened, and, full in the midst of the waters and the clouds, uprose the red sun and flashed upon us. Instead of the gentle moonbeams on the waters, there was now a wide track of golden light which it dazzled us to look at. The sea, which heretofore had been quiet and beautiful as death, now seemed to throb briskly upon the strand, and the crimson and striped sails of the early fishers' boats, a mile or more from land, swelled, and urged their masters on their way. Turning from the sea to the land, we saw other signs of this instantaneous change from night to day. The well-tilled slopes, vineyards, and olive-groves were bright with sunlight; the snowy cisterns set in the fields caught the eye; heavy drays were moving on the roads; and the sturdy labourers of the March country—men and women—were already afoot in groups, with their implements in their hands. We opened the windows to let in the day, and with the meagre chirp of birds came the perfume of the fruit trees and flowers, all refreshed by the cool dew of the past night.

It was at five o'clock of this beautiful spring morning that I left the train at the station of Loreto. Every one knows for what Loreto is famous, and has been held in honour by all devout Catholics from the Popes downward for the last six hundred years. Here, encrusted with sculpture and architectural adornments, is to be

found the Santa Casa, or Holy Dwelling in which Christ and His mother lived long ago at Nazareth. How comes it to be at Loreto, an insignificant little ecclesiastical city on a hill-slope of the Apennines, many hundreds of miles from Palestine? How, indeed, one may ask? But the historical narrative tells us the tale with a circumstantiality and conviction which go far to remove the doubt of sceptics, if not quite far enough.

For many years the Holy Dwelling remained at Nazareth, honoured by the Christians who survived their Master, and even used by the Apostles for the celebration of the Eucharist. But when the Romans took all Palestine under their suzerainty, Nazareth suffered. The town decayed, the old houses fell to pieces, and the old believers went away, or changed their faith. Thus for centuries Nazareth was little more than a name to those who preserved the tradition of Christianity. To the noble mother of Constantine the Great it was due that the Santa Casa was rediscovered and honoured afresh. Helena went from Jerusalem to the north, and investigating among the mounds of rubbish which stood for Nazareth, the Santa Casa came to light, miraculously preserved from the ruin and defilement which surrounded it. The very altar at which the Apostles were wont to celebrate the Eucharist was found within the house intact. A miraculous wall had been raised by superhuman hands round the house to protect it. Again the Santa Casa attracted the devout in crowds for a long period of time. But once again Palestine fell under the sway of rulers who had no sympathy with Christianity. To the Saracens the Santa Casa was but a source of mockery; and so, to deliver it from the hands of the Moslems, the first stage of the wonderful compound miracle which was to bring the house finally to rest at Loreto, was worked in the year 1291. Angels detached the house from its surroundings, and, lifting it upon their shoulders, flew away with it. And whither did they fly? The narrative may speak briefly for itself: "It was on a certain cloudless morning, when the sea was calm and sparkling, that those of the inhabitants of the village of Tersatto who were up at daybreak, saw to their surprise a new house situated upon a hillock close to their dwellings. They ran towards it in amazement; but their wonder was far from being lessened when upon nearing it they perceived that it was a four-sided

building in the shape of a church, having a bell-tower provided with two bells, and the whole of it standing unsupported and without any foundation." It seems that between midnight and the dawn of this tenth of May—a Sunday in the octave of the Ascension—the house had thus suddenly been transported from Palestine to this small town in Dalmatia, on the eastern shores of the Adriatic. Words cannot describe the happiness of these poor Dalmatians, when in a vision it was declared to their priest what the building was that had thus appeared in their midst.

But alas! for some never-explained reason, the Santa Casa did not stay at Tersatto. The villagers and others assembled to honour it in crowds, and did all they could to show their gratitude for its apparition; but in the night of the ninth and tenth of December, 1294, again it was uplifted and moved across the sea, and this time it stayed on the western shores of the Adriatic, near Recanati, a few miles from Loreto. Of the distress that seized these poor Dalmatians, the historians say much. For years and centuries they prayed beseechingly that the Santa Casa might return to them. "Come back to us, O dear Lady; come back to us, with thy house, O Mary!" Such was the refrain of their petitions and lamentations. And even now, six centuries after the date of the transportation of the Santa Casa, it is a common sight to see groups of peasantry from the eastern Adriatic shores crying before the shrine of Loreto, or going on their knees in single file, licking the stones which bind the Holy Dwelling from external observation, and echoing the old prayer.

This time the Santa Casa alighted in a laurel wood, where it was discovered in the morning. Balls of fire had been seen in the air over the site by some shepherds bivouacking in the open; and this wonder, conjoined with the customary revelation about the nature of the Santa Casa, soon drew pilgrims into the laurel wood in crowds. They spent whole weeks round about the house, camping there in a state of holy ecstasy, and regardless of the discomfort they had to suffer. And thus for awhile nothing was heard in the neighbourhood but a perpetual murmur of prayers and jubilant cries. But the number of rich and unprotected pilgrims who resorted, hither did not fail to attract many rogues, who had no care for spiritual concerns. Consequently assaults, robbery,

and even murder, became commonplace occurrences. And so, yet again, the Santa Casa changed its site, moving to a green hill about a mile away, where by right of law it became the property of the two brothers who owned the land on which it stood. These two brothers were at first delighted by the arrival of the Santa Casa. They saw in it a source of wealth, and at once set about exploiting their treasure. But soon they fell to quarrelling about the sacred possession, and they even tried to kill each other. So, justly indignant, the Santa Casa determined to quit them, and made its fourth and last migration to the hill of Loreto, where now it stands fast enclosed in a massive cathedral, and daily honoured by a numerous band of priests and laymen from all parts of the world.

All the rickety cars standing outside the Loreto Station were decorated with boards inscribed "To the Santa Casa!"

"There is a mass at six o'clock," said the driver of my car to me; and he seemed a little scandalised when I remarked that, after a night's railway journey, a bath and breakfast were more to my taste. However, he took me briskly enough up the hill, past the many shrines that lead to the great shrine; past the Municipal Customs Officers, who looked to see that I was not cheating Loreto of any trifle of its revenue; past the many labourers trooping out to the vineyards and orchards on these hot hill-slopes, all with a nod of greeting and congratulations to my landlord, who had me in charge, until we baited at the "Locanda Speranza," in one corner of the market-place. It was a cheerful chance that had brought me for a night's lodging to an hotel blessed with the name of "Hope!" But there proved to be no luxury in the "Locanda Speranza," and, when evening came, methought it were better to have christened it the "Hotel Fleas."

Of the Cathedral of Loreto, this must be said unhesitatingly—that it is a noble building, richly endowed, and happy in having the square in front of it half girt by other buildings that do not dishonour it. Of the City of Loreto, one must confess that it is saturated almost "ad nauseam" with evidences of its exceeding sanctity. The streets are full of ecclesiastics, speaking divers tongues, and wearing a variety of costumes: for Loreto is so noted a place of resort for Catholics of all countries that daily throughout the year confession is heard within the Cathedral in ten or twelve languages. The shops of the

city, like its inhabitants, seem to run in a groove. I walked down a street wholly devoted to merchandise, dependent more or less upon the Santa Casa. The jewelers, for instance, had their windows full of miniatures of the Santa Casa in different metals, for locket, scarf-pins, sleeve-links, or any other kind of personal adornment. The photographers had been marvellously industrious in the same limited line of work. The very confectioners offered cathedrals and models of sugar; and the other shops were full of tin or chandlery were having more or less reference to Loreto and the Santa Casa. And while I walked up and down this, the most characteristic street of the town, the bell of the Cathedral sounded ever and anon, to mark the beginning or the end of this function or that, and impressed upon the mind how impossible it would be to live in Loreto without yielding sooner or later to the religious spell which enfolds the place.

I entered a shop to buy some trifle, and of course it was immediately apparent to the shopkeeper that I was a stranger.

"Sir," said he, "it is your first visit to the Holy Place. How happy an opportunity for you! We have just got in a new stock of rosaries of all kinds. You may have a rosary of diamonds and rubies alternately for a matter of twenty thousand francs, or what you please to pay. In any case, you will not think of entering the Santa Casa unprovided with some holy object to be blessed by the officiating Father therein. Such an omission would be unheard of, and so, sir, I beg to direct your very careful attention to all these beautiful treasures in this glass case on my counter."

As it was so evidently expected of me, I bought a pretty rosary of red, blue, and yellow stones, and walked off with it towards the cathedral. The many other dealers of similar objects were rather less polite, however, when they saw me pass their doors, displaying my purchase. It is a sad thing that one can seldom oblige one person without thereby disobliging someone else.

Thus musing, I found myself in the Piazza, before the colonnade of the Cathedral, and in the midst of a most afflicting swarm of the lame, the blind, and the diseased. What a trial are these poor suffering sons and daughters of men to their more healthy brethren! Who can help pitying them at first; and alas! such

is their merciless rapacity and tireless patience, who in the end can help execrating them?

For a quarter of an hour I moved from spot to spot, imploring the poor folks to leave me alone. I had given them all the money I intended to give them; why could they not do something as a return? But no. They dodged and bullied me, until I hurried up the steps of the Cathedral and into the aisle, in a white heat of indignation. On reflection, one wonders how these blind people can see their way so well after the stranger; but perhaps they go by the voices of their friends. As for the lame and the halt, I own I never saw anything to equal the astonishing dexterity with which the one-legged beggars and the cripples on crutches chased me from pillar to post over the flags of the Piazza!

Inside the Cathedral of Loreto one is attracted towards one object solely. Not that the edifice is barren or displeasing. Far from that. It has a large collection of pictures in frescoes and altar-pieces, though certain of them are suffering terribly at the hands of time. Some of its marble monuments are exceedingly ornate. Its sculptures round the Santa Casa are unrivalled works of Bramante and Sansovino. And there is an astounding treasury full of gold crucifixes, rings, bracelets, etc., jewelled offerings, and a bewildering multitude of other valuables.

But all these things are trivial by the side of the Santa Casa itself, which stands under the central dome of the building, to the right of the choir. You do not see it at first; but you are drawn towards it by the number of pilgrims and others who surround and crowd into it.

Priests, in crimson cassocks and exquisite lace embroidery over their cassocks, go to and fro relieving each other in their perpetual labours within the shrine, and engaged in confessing those who wish to present themselves to the Santa Casa unburdened by guilty fears.

A guide soon fastened upon me within the building. As a rule, guides are not welcome to me; but I accepted this man's services, and he led me with some degree of pompous clatter through the groaning penitents, round the Santa Casa and into the Holy Place itself.

"Look!" he said in a whisper, pointing towards the altar, which dazzled the eyes with its blaze of lights, and cornuscating reflections from the facets of the

many jewels which gleamed from the altar furniture—"Maria!"

There, sure enough, by the side of the head of the priest, I saw the curious little effigy which goes by the name of the Virgin of Loreto. It is a bell-shaped piece of cedar-wood about four palms in height, the head (or neck of the bell) being carved into the semblance of a woman and a child. No less a person than St. Luke is the reputed author of the work, and he is supposed to have studied it from the life. Accepting this belief, it may be imagined how the worshippers of Loreto feel when they set eyes on this little image, which is gilt and mounted with diamonds, and emeralds, and rubies.

When the French sacked Northern Italy, as they afterwards sacked the whole of Spain, the vast treasure of Loreto did not escape them. They stripped the Cathedral of all its valuables; and, among other things, the Virgin of Loreto, with her diamonds and emeralds, was transported to Paris. From 1797 to 1801 the little figure of cedar wood stayed in captivity like Pius the Seventh himself. But in 1801 the captive Pope obtained possession of it, and eventually returned it to Loreto, with a magnificent apparel of pearls, brilliants, emeralds, and topazes, and it was welcomed with tears of joy by the priests and people. Since then the treasury has been so well cared for by the opulent faithful that, in spite of assertions to the contrary, its wealth can be little less than it was previous to the depredations of the French.

The following are the recorded dimensions of the mere husk of the Santa Casa. It is about nineteen palms high, forty-three palms in length, eighteen in breadth, and two-and-a-half in thickness. The material is a rough kind of tufa, cut in the form of enormous bricks, roughly hewn. On the walls are the traces of some ancient frescoes, in the Greek Church style of art.

It must be remembered that the Santa Casa arrived from Palestine duly provided with an altar. This altar is now enclosed within the large altar at which mass is celebrated many times in the week. Rumour says that St. Peter himself consecrated the small altar, which is some six palms long by five in height.

Besides the altar and the precious figure of St. Luke's carving, there was found in a little cupboard of the Santa Casa a couple of bowls, which were at once

said to be those used by the Holy Family in the preparation of their simple meals. These bowls are kept, carefully mounted in gilt bronza, in a red leather case. Originally they were set in gold, but the French stripped them of that.

In looking over the other treasures of the church I found a curious tablet descriptive of the Santa Casa, the description being in a sort of English, and the work of a Jesuit priest named Cobbington, in the year 1635. I should like to give the whole narrative, it is so curiously written; but the few following lines will be enough:

"The Kirk of Laureto was a Caumber of the house of the Blest Virgin, neir Jerusalem, in the toune of Nazaret, in whilk she was borne and teende, and greeted by the Angel, and thairin also conceived and nourisht har sonne Jesus whill he was twalle year awd. This Caumber, efter the Ascensione of our B. Seviour, was by the Apostles hallowed and made a Kirk, in honor of our B. Ledy, and S. Luke framed a Pietur to har vary liknes thair zit to be seine," etc.

The Jesuit was evidently a Scotchman. Oddly enough, while I was copying this inscription, I was accosted in Hibernian English by a burly young priest, who soon informed me that he was the Confessor of the English section of penitents at Loreto, and, therefore, probably, the generic descendant of the Jesuit Cobbington above-mentioned. This priest talked with me for a few minutes. He had travelled about the world a good deal, was lately from New York, and greatly preferred life in New York to life in Loreto.

"However, what would you have?" he said finally, with a genial heave of his shoulders; and with a merry nod, and expressing the hope that we might meet later in the day, he went off to his confessional box.

To my regret, however, we did not again come across each other; I spent an hour in the evening in trying to find him in the stately chambers, with their old frescoes and carved work, which are the residence of many of the Loreto Fathers on the north side of the square before the Cathedral. I wandered from the nest of one priest to the nest of another, deeply interested in what I saw, but I could not find the Hibernian Father. It was a fine evening: the red flushes in the sky seemed even to colour the cold leaden dome of the Cathedral and the stones of the colonnades; and from an elevated terrace in this range

of ecclesiastical buildings, I could see a multitude of wide-skirted and broad-hatted clergy arm-in-arm, taking the air in the streets of the city and on the battlements beyond, which look over many a pleasant valley, white river-bed, and distant town on distant hill-top, towards the snowy Apennines themselves.

In the meantime, however, I had made another pilgrimage. When I asked my landlord of the hotel "Hope" if Recanati was within an easy walk of his house, he at once, and reasonably enough, assumed that I wished to see Recanati, because there the poet Leopardi was born, and lived most of the tiresome days of his suffering life.

"It is a fine road the whole way, signor," said my landlord; "and yet I would rather that you let me drive you in the little carriage; for the roads are hard and white, and there will be much dust; and the sun will be very hot. Yes, we have much to be proud of, as you say, signor; for it is not every little town of the Apennines that has a Santa Casa and a genius like Leopardi so near to it at the same time. But so it is!"

I declined the carriage and walked to Recanati. It was certainly a hot walk, and a steep one; along the roadsides were vine-yards and much-tortured fruit trees, adapted in the Italian style for the interlacing of the vines. There were grain fields below, set about with similar fruit trees, so that grapes, and pears, and barley might come up from the same patch. Brown men and women were busy with shears and hoes, hodding and pruning the vines, which already had put forth very many of the tender leaves of hope. Though hot, however, it was cheerful to look over the miles of sunlit hills and valleys, all wonderfully cultivated and bare of large trees, which might else draw off too much of the land's fertility—north, south, and west; with the dusky towns set here and there on the crests of the hills, and the scant river-beds with their long track of whitened stones, trending all towards the near Adriatic shore. For a while the big hill of Recanati—quite covered as to its summit by the sombre town—hid the bulk of the distant Apennines from sight; but as I mounted slowly, the sparkling peaks o'ertopped the foreground, and a superb landscape of Central Italy came gradually to view. It was with these mountains, these rich but unfoliated valleys, these river-beds, and yonder blue Adriatic

constantly before his eyes that Giacomo Leopardi wrote his bitter, sad indictments against destiny and his fellow-townsmen.

Recanati is still a fortified town, as it was hundreds of years ago. One enters the precincts under an enormous gateway, now bearing the arms of the King of Italy instead of those of the Papal Kings. Instantly the gloom of the dark, narrow streets, with the houses a hundred feet high on either hand, strikes a mortal chill to one's bones and one's spirits. How could a poet live in such a dungeon of a place? one asks oneself.

With much trouble I found my way to the house of Leopardi—Casa Leopardi. The Recanatense speak a dialect of their own, which sounds infamously to strange ears; and for a time all my enquiries fell flat. However I reached the chief square of the town, with municipal buildings and a brand-new stone post-office on one side; a church on the other, dingy a cracked bell as a signal for the procession thence of one of those curious throngs of priests, acolytes, statues, incense-bearers, and devout laymen, which are still common in the Papal States; and shops on the last of its sides. Here, in the middle of the square, which is now Piazza Giacomo Leopardi, stands a statue of the poet, detestable in every way. The ignoramus of Recanati jeered the young poet while he was alive; called him "pedant," and so forth; sneered when his judgements on matters of taste were in opposition to theirs; but, after his death, they gave him this monument to perpetuate their own imbecility, and christened a street, a school, and a public square after his name!

On my way to Leopardi's house, I wandered into what I thought was the Recanati post-office.

"Have you a telegram for me?" I asked, and offered my card.

"Oh no!" said the clerk, staring; and then with a grin he took me by the arm, led me down a passage or two, and into a room full of books, papers, and documents, and to a table whereat a stout gentleman was sitting with gold glasses on his nose.

A "pothor of talk" ensued between the two men. It seemed that I was thus summarily hailed before the Sindaco, or Mayor of the town, indicted as a stranger. Certain other officials came in one by one, attracted by the hubbub. The Mayor stroked his face, bowed and smiled at my

every word, and when I stopped speaking and awaited intelligent speech in return, shrugged his shoulders.

And what was it all about? one might ask. Simply this. I had come to Recanati in expectation of a telegram. To the clerk the circumstance was mortally suspicious. To the Mayor, fortunately, after a time, it seemed an innocent business enough; and so it was due to his good worship that I was taken to the post-office and allowed to receive my telegram in due form.

Eventually I reached the gate of Casa Leopardi. Twice on the way I had indulged in coffee at a café. On each occasion the proprietor of the café brought a bottle of rum with the coffee cup, and in a whisper asked if I would not take rum with my coffee. The air of Recanati is, as Leopardi says, so keen and harsh that I suppose the Recanatense cannot refrain from cordials. Under persuasion, I tried the rum, and liked it well.

Casa Leopardi is stately, cold, and grim. As a summer residence it would be agreeable; but arctic in winter, with its outlook at the Apennines, whose breath blows straight upon it. A small piazza is before the house, with the towers of two or three dingy red churches within a stone's throw of the gate. Some inferior houses form the rest of the square, and it was at the windows of one of these houses that young Leopardi, peering from his own bed-room window, used to see the two girlish faces (Nerina and Silvia) which first stirred his boyish heart. A high, white wall forms part of the long façade of Casa Leopardi, and the tops of orange trees and other greenery peering over the wall show that here is the garden wherein the young Leopardis used to play.

The memory of Giacomo Leopardi is magnificently enshrined within Casa Leopardi by the present Count and his family. One sees the suite of rooms which compose the rare old library of the house, preserved as they were when Giacomo spent his days in them. The very tables on which he wrote are as they were—with his inkstand, pen, favourite writing-pad, and so on. But there is, besides, a superb room decorated with rich marbles, and with much upholstery in crimson velvet, which is devoted to the manuscripts, published works, and bibliography of the poet. These are displayed, amid a glitter of brass and glass, in ebony-mounted cases. From the first childish scribblings to the last of his manuscripts,

one sees them all. Knowing the history of Giacomo Leopardi, and the nature of his parents, both of whom survived him, it is easy to animate this old house with imaginative shapes that are not wholly unreal.

PRIMROSES.

Yes, darling, sweet and very gay—
But take your pretty flowers away,
And play with them apart:
Twine yellow posies, fresh and fair,
For mother's breast and sister's hair,
But not for me, dear heart.

Run on, my bonny little child,
And pull more primroses, beguiled
By gracious green and gold.
The wee one leaves me, gay and good,
And wanders down the primrose wood,
The wood I knew of old.

I loved the primrose once, no flower
Like that pale yellow bloom had power
To stir my inmost soul:
She wore it on her maiden breast,
Before the demon of unrest
Her girlish sweetness stole.

For her dear sake my life grew glad:
I loved her, I, a town-bred lad,
Awhile from taskwork free.
I loved her with a fervent truth,
The first hot passion of my youth—
I thought love answered me.

Another wooed her in the wood,
As in life's April time she stood,
A primrose in her hand.
He whispered low what wealth could buy,
He praised her beauty, fit to vie
With any in the land.

I lost her. If she went to shame
With open eyes—or if it came
Upon her unawares,
I know not: ere the primrose flowers
Had faded in her native bowers,
She left me to despair.

My great wound gaped, and ached, and bled,
And healed. I sepulchred my dead:
Yet April's beam and breeze
Bring with the primrose, flower and leaf,
The memory of my first great grief,
Beneath the budding trees.

Once, once again, I saw her face,
Deep-furrowed with the heart's disgrace,
Deep-scarred with sin and care:
With tattered garments, trembling feet,
She paced the busy city street,
And I—I saw her there!

She held her primroses on high,
To tempt the crowd that hurried by,
Some careless and some wroth;
Poor flowers! like her who fain had sold,
They too had lost their virgin gold—
Decay had marked them both.

A look, a word. Nay, drop the veil;
Poor heart! she lived beyond the pale,
She died at peace with God:
The hope life forfeited, death gave;
Primroses blossom on her grave,
Like stars upon the sod!

FROM HER HIGH ESTATE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS. PART I.

SOMEWHERE in North Germany — no matter where — there stood, and, although much changed, still stands on a dark-red sandstone rock, overlooking a winding river, the ancient castle of Berckenstein, with its square tower, its arched gateway, its moat, and all the other legitimate accessories of a mediæval Schloss.

To have seen Berckenstein in its untarnished glory it would have been necessary to visit it a couple of hundred years ago; but even so lately as the time of Magda von Bercken's early childhood, the ghosts of all its old magnificence haunted it and kept up the traditions of a greatness that had wasted away to a mere shadow.

From her babyhood, Magda had imbibed the idea that the von Berckens had, once upon a time, been very rich and powerful, but that evil days had fallen upon them. There was plenty of testimony to both these facts: the great deserted suites of rooms, hung with moth-eaten tapestry; the faded brocade of the handsome furniture; the ancient mirrors and mouldings, on which the gilding was tarnished with age; the vast stables, where two superannuated carriage horses made the emptiness more perceptible; the wonderful pleasure gardens, laid out in terraces along the hill side, with the dried-up fountains and crumbling statues; the grass-grown paths and ruined summer-houses; all were eloquent witnesses of a splendid past, to which the embarrassed present might look back, partly in envy and partly in reproach. In point of fact, it was no wonder that the lustre of the von Bercken family was a bygone thing. One prodigal son after another — sometimes three or four at once — had wasted their substance in riotous living, until the family inheritance consisted of little more than mortgages and hereditary embarrassments.

The present Count — Magda's father — had proved true to the tradition of his house, and, after a stormy youth, had found it an absolute necessity to settle down, with his wife and one child, on the most economical footing, in his great feudal castle, which would conveniently have housed a regiment of soldiers.

In the village, which clustered humbly round the castle gates, there were wonderful stories handed down from grandparents

to grandchildren, of the von Berckens: of their handsome faces; of their irresistible wooing; of their lavish generosity; of their dare-devil, harum-scarum escapades; and of their dependents' devotion to them; but the present Count had not inherited the family popularity. He was handsome, it is true, but his face was gloomy and cold; he could not afford to be lavish; and, as to escapades, his day for broadcasting wild oats was gone by, and he was now unwillingly harvesting a large crop, not all of his own husbandry.

Nor was the Countess a favourite. They called her proud; and, perhaps, they were right. Life had been a great disappointment to her, and she had grown bitter and reserved.

As to Magda, when she walked with her old French *bonne* along the stony village street, or sat beside her mother in the lumbering family coach, the old folks would look at her with plaintive head-shakings and say:

"She's a chip of the old block, a real out-and-out von Bercken; and she's the last of them too, unless something very unexpected happens. Eh, isn't it a thousand pities she isn't a boy?"

Which was a sentiment Magda would have cordially echoed. For the child dimly felt that any change in the tedious monotony of her little life would be a change for the better. Her chief occupation was the preliminaries of a polite education, under the care of her old *bonne*, Valérie, and consisted in repeating French verbs and in getting the Catechism by heart. Her play hours, when she could so contrive it — and Magda was fairly ingenious for her age — were spent on a distant terrace in the garden, as far out of Valérie's sight as possible. It was a beautiful place for solitary games. There was an old summer-house, and a fallen statue, and a large bed of tangled violets and anemones; and there had been a wren's nest two years following in a hole in the parapet; but, best of all, it was so pleasant to look down on the mill far below by the river, where there always seemed to be something going on. It was a great amusement to the lonely child to watch from her vantage ground the many comings and goings to and fro, and to listen to the busy sound of the water splashing over the weir; till one fine day the temptation to go a little nearer proving too strong for her, Magda set off down the hill, and, scrambling through a gap in the neglected fence, found

herself on the rough stone pavement by the river-side.

Once there her curiosity to inspect the mill was forgotten, and she turned her steps up the stream bent on a voyage of discovery. There might be so many wonderful things by the side of a river when one was all alone, without Valérie to hold one's hand and bustle one along. Did not a Princess, once upon a time, find a beautiful baby in a cradle among the tall rushes? And even if Magda failed to light on such a treasure as that, there might be a bird's nest or a nice bunch of forget-me-nots.

Before, however, she had found either, she spied out, sitting on a willow which grew slantwise over the water, a fair-haired, round-cheeked boy, dressed in coarse clothes, but with a certain vigorous grace about him which made him look something superior to a mere village boy. He was deeply intent on a piece of wood, which he was cutting and shaping with his knife, far too intent to hear footsteps, or, if he heard, to raise his eyes in vulgar curiosity.

He was a village boy. Magda saw that at a glance, and, of course, Valérie never let her speak with the village boys; but Valérie was not at hand, and the fair-haired boy looked as if he might make a good playmate, if he would only leave off chipping at his wood and look at her.

Her patience was exhausted before his attention wandered from his work.

"What are you so busy at, little boy?" she called out at last, in the imperious tone of a person who has a right to an answer.

"Hallo!" came back in an unconcerned voice, "little boy indeed! I wonder where you would come in, if I am to be called little."

"But I want to know what you are doing," repeated Magda, a little less imperatively.

"What does it matter to you what I am doing?" he returned, apparently not inclined to make friends.

"I'm coming to sit by you and see," said Magda, making preparations to suit the action to the word.

"You'd better stay where you are; you'll fall into the water and be drowned, and then you'd be sorry."

"I shouldn't fall in. Only perhaps it would be nicer if you came here and showed it me. I can't make out one bit what it is."

"I don't suppose you can. Little girls like you," this with an air of immense superiority, "can't know anything of these things. I'm making a water-wheel."

"A water-wheel? But it's wooden!"

"And why shouldn't it be wooden? Water-wheels are generally wooden—aren't they?"

"I don't know," replied Magda, rather humbly, "I never saw one."

"I told you so!" returned the boy contemptuously, "little girls know nothing."

Here the whittling came to a momentary pause, while the young lord of creation felt in his pocket for another tool.

"Is it finished?" asked Magda anxiously.

"Finished!" retorted the boy; "why, it's just about begun."

"And when shall you finish it?"

"That's more than I can tell you."

"And what will it be for, when it is done—for a plaything?"

"Plaything!" he exclaimed, "I should think not. Why, I shall work it."

"Oh," replied Magda, greatly overawed by a boy who would make something which was meant to work, with tools which he carried in his breeches-pockets. "You must be very clever. I should like to see how it works—when it is finished, I mean."

"Well," he returned, apparently mollified by her flattering interest, "perhaps you shall."

Then there was a short silence.

Magda stood very still, and watched the boy's swift fingers fly backwards and forwards.

"What's your name?" she asked at last, "and where do you live?"

"You're a good hand at asking questions, aren't you?" returned the lad, without looking up.

"Well," pursued Magda with perfect good-humour, conversation on any terms being preferable to solitude. "If you'll tell me your name, I'll tell you mine."

"I know it already," he replied unceremoniously. "You're the little lass from the castle; and I'll tell you something else—you'll get a rare wiggling presently for running away from your nurse."

"I shan't, little boy—I mean big boy—truly I shan't. You needn't be afraid of that. I don't care a bit for Valérie; and now if you know my name's Magda without my telling you, it would only be fair if you told me yours."

"Oh, well, Miss Inquisitive, my name is Friedel Beumer, and I live at the mill; and now you had better run away home."

"Not till you show me that thing you are making. Please, Friedel, there's a good, kind boy. It's so dull up in the garden all alone. I don't want to hurry back." And so, after a little more pleading, Friedel allowed himself to be persuaded by the sweet voice and eager eyes, to do the honours of his amateur mechanics.

"You won't understand it, you know," he threw in, by way of a corrective to his condescension. "And if you did, you wouldn't care about it—a doll would be more in your way." And so saying, he began his explanation.

It was full of technical expressions which were unintelligible to poor Magda; nevertheless, she made a great effort, as her sex will do, when it means to rise superior to an implied defect, and the consequence was that Friedel's estimate of little girls received a violent shock.

"I've understood it nearly all," she said when the foggy dissertation was ended, "and I like water-wheels very much; so I shall come down here again and play with you. I think you are a very nice boy."

"That's all right," replied Friedel, feeling unaccountably flattered. "You come here to-morrow afternoon, and then I shall have put the hammer in its place, and you will see what a crank is really like."

So Magda's experiment had proved a success, as far as finding a new interest for her lonely little life would make it successful. However, she kept the secret of it all to herself, lest any one should feel in duty bound to tell Valérie or her mother, and so an end should be put to her budding intimacy with the miller's son.

Friedrich Beumer, the well-to-do miller of Berckenstein, was a notable personage among his fellow villagers, for, contrary to the custom of the Berckensteiners, he had gone far afield to seek his fortune as a youth; and thus he knew something of the world that lay beyond the furthest bend of the river and the dimmest distance of blue hill. He had left Berckenstein a very unhappy young man, after the last scene of a sad love drama had been played out. It was the old story, with the old ending, which need not be set down here. It is enough to say that the miller's early manhood had had its trials.

During his absence from his native soil he had shaken off a good many prejudices; and when he returned at the age of thirty-five, to take the place of foreman

at Berckenstein Mill, he excited astonishment, bordering on alarm, by the Red Radicalism of opinions, which he was not in the least careful to conceal. However, though his opinions were undoubtedly shocking to his Conservative rustic cotemporaries, his capacity for business was beyond criticism.

The mill thrived; the old miller left all to his care; and at last the miller's only daughter, whose dowry was the mill, won so much of Beumer's heart as remained from the wreck of his early hopes. So after the lapse of a few years he was the owner of Berckenstein Mill, and the most substantial tax-payer of the Gemeinde.

His ambition, so far as concerned himself, was satisfied; it remained to be seen what could be done by perseverance and well-applied efforts for his only child, the boy whose acquaintance Magda had made in spite of rebuffs.

There was no mistaking the lad's vocation. It was the miller's pride and joy to see the spark of aptitude kindling day by day.

"Folks may say what they like, Ursula," the miller said to his wife one sunny Sunday afternoon, as they sat in the garden by the river, discussing the great subject; "they may say what they like, but I shan't bind our Friedel 'prentice to a miller, as I was bound, though here's the mill ready to his hand."

"All the same, it's a fine trade, is a miller's," replied the Frau Müllerin. "I've been used to having millers about me; there was father and grandfather, and the two uncles, and you; and it'll seem odd if the lad isn't a miller too. Besides, as you say, here's the mill and all ready to his hand."

"I don't care," replied the miller authoritatively; "I don't care if there were twenty mills, nor if you'd had twenty fathers and they'd all been millers. The lad isn't cut out for a miller, he's a notch above that; as soon as he can write a good hand and do his sums pretty sharp, I shall send him to school in Düsseldorf."

"I don't hold with sending lads away like that," objected his wife. "It costs a sight of money, and they learn lots of things that are best left unlearned."

"And then," pursued Beumer, taking no notice of this home-thrust, "I shall see if we can afford to article him to a first-rate mechanical engineer; then he must go to England or to Belgium for a couple of years."

"And then?" Frau Beumer had heard these schemes unfolded so often, that it was merely as a matter of form that she said "And then?"

"Then he will be fit to take a good position as inspector of machinery under Government, unless, perhaps, he patents some discovery of his own by which he can make a fortune. And that I think more than likely, for he is always cutting, and contriving, and shaping little models. I'll bet what you like that he's somewhere now, with a bit of wood, and his knife and his file."

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Frau Beumer, "he is wonderfully fond of chipping up wood; but so are most boys; and I've always been used to think of the mill as——"

"Most boys!" interrupted her husband contemptuously. "I should like to see another boy in this country-side who'd make a water-wheel like that one our Friedel was working yesterday. You've got one idea of a man, and that is that he must be powdered over with flour."

So saying the miller rose, stretched himself, knocked the ashes from the painted porcelain bowl of his long pipe, and set off in quest of the incarnation of his ambitious hopes.

"Friedel," he called along the garden and orchard, "Friedel, come here." But he called in vain; no one answered, and the miller sauntered along the river-side, his hands behind his back, and his eyes on the ground, half-forgotten why he had started.

"The lad takes after me," he soliloquised. "He's got a spirit of his own, and he'll have his way; and he won't knuckle under to his mother's fads. I know he won't." Presently he heard the sound of children's voices, and looking up he saw the object of his reverie sitting on the fallen willow with his arm round a little girl.

Both children were intent on a book which lay between them, and from which the little girl was reading aloud; her clear treble voice reached the miller's ear—

"The swineherd, that is, the real Prince—but no one knew he was anything more than a real swineherd—did not pass his time idly. He now made a rattle, which, when swung round, played——"

"Hullo! Friedel!" he called out, ruthlessly interrupting the thrilling crisis. "What are you about?"

Friedel looked up with a shame-faced

blush, though, as a rule, he did not stand in awe even of his burly, determined father.

"Oh!" said Magda, with great composure, "I suppose you are Friedel's father, the miller. He's all right, and we're both being very still lest I should fall into the water."

"And who are you, pray," said the miller, though he knew well enough, "that you should answer when I call to Friedel?"

"I am Magda von Bercken," replied the child coolly, "and I am come down to read Hans Andersen's stories to Friedel, if——"

"Well, my boy," interrupted the miller, ignoring Magda, "I should have thought you had more sense."

"They are not silly stories," interposed Magda eagerly: "if you would like to see what they are about, Friedel shall have the book to take home."

"Take it home yourself!" retorted Beumer, rudely. "We want nothing belonging to the Castle in our house; and who gave you leave to come down here all alone, and to play with a common boy like Friedel?"

"He's very nice and clever, if he is a common boy," replied Magda, hotly; "he wouldn't take me into any mischief, I am sure."

"That isn't the question; it's more your mischief than his I am afraid of." Magda stood indignant and breathless at this. "And now you come along with me. I shall take you back home and tell your Mamselle to keep her eye on you a bit better in the future. Come along."

"Thank you," said Magda haughtily. "I am going home by myself;" and passing the miller's outstretched hand, she went deliberately up the hill-side, and clambering over the broken hedge with as much dignity as she could command, disappeared in the garden. The miller, nevertheless, took his way to the Castle, where he asked to see the Countess herself, and to her unfolded the nature and extent of Magda's delinquencies.

That evening, as the Beumer family sat at their early supper, they were startled by the apparition of a little figure with a tear-stained face, which stood on the threshold.

"Friedel," she said, half-sobbing, and before any of them had recovered from their surprise. "Friedel, I've come to say good-bye. They've scolded me dreadfully for playing with you; it was no use my

telling them how nice you are, because my father keeps on saying that the miller has very wicked opinions. Only I shan't leave off being fond of you, and when I'm grown up we will marry one another, as we settled on Thursday."

The miller laughed loudly; his laugh sounded very unpleasant. His wife looked aghast. She had not lost her reverence for the lords of the soil.

"We will, Friedel, won't we? Promise you won't forget," she urged, drawing a step nearer.

"What?" asked Friedel, trying to look indifferent and succeeding very badly.

"We said we would be married some day. You mustn't forget it."

"I don't think we shall," replied Friedel. "It was only just a game."

Magda cast a despairing glance round. It all seemed too cruel to bear, especially the miller's laughter. She turned to go. Then Friedel, stirred by a sudden impulse, flung down his spoon, and, jumping up, ran to her. Winding his arms round his high-born admirer, he kissed her wet cheek, then pushing her away, said:

"Don't cry; it's only babies who blubber like that: and as to being really married, why, you'll be much too grand."

After this unsatisfactory farewell Magda went her way, heavy-hearted, back to the Castle, and the Baumer family finished their soup in silence; the Frau Müllerin, because her husband looked as if one of his sulky fits were coming on; Friedel, because he was alternately projecting a new and more ingenious employment for his tools, and wondering what became of the Prince who disguised himself as a swineherd; and the miller, because something had recalled the old sad story of his first courtship.

SOUTH AFRICAN SKETCHES.

PIET.

My boy Piet was not handsome. Indeed, to European ideas, his small eyes set obliquely in his face; his wide and flat nose with its distorted nostrils, and the bridge so little elevated that the space between the cheek-bones was almost flat; his protruding lips; and long and prominent, but narrow and pointed chin; might appear positively ugly, notwithstanding the verdicts of the various Hottentot belles with whom he was on familiar terms, and who evidently regarded him with approving eyes.

He was a pure Hottentot, of a type now almost extinct; for though, about two hundred and thirty years ago, when Van Riebeck was Dutch Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, the Hottentots proper numbered more than two hundred thousand, internecine warfare so thinned their numbers and the survivors subsequently intermarried to such an extent with Malays, Kaffirs, Half-castes, and Europeans, that, strictly speaking, they have long since ceased to exist as a tribe. The varieties of the Hottentot proper—that is, the Korannas, the Namaquas, the Griquas, and the Bushmen—live and thrive, but the parental stock bids fair soon to be as utterly extinct as the dodo.

Piet was not hirsute. He had sprouting, at rare intervals on his upper lip, a few hairs, the number of which would not increase if he lived to be a hundred years old; and on his head the small black tufts of wool were sprinkled so sparingly as to permit of a small circle of scalp being perceived around each. His vicinity was unpleasant to the olfactory nerves—he was still less partial to the outward application of water than to the inward—but he was faithful; tolerably honest, except in matters in which food, drink, or money were concerned; less of a drunkard than most of his compatriots; and a liar of but small capacity. He was about five feet four inches in height, and of a jaundiced yellow hue. His age amounted to about sixteen years in actual time; but he appeared to be at least a century old in wickedness and depravity.

He called himself a Dutch Lutheran; but I do not believe he had ever entered a church in his life, and he paid no more attention to the ritual of that creed than he did to its moral precepts. Large-minded and free from bias, however, as he seemed to be upon the subject of religion, I observed that whenever he chanced to come upon a "praying mantis," the insect which his ancestors used to receive with the highest tokens of veneration and welcome as a god, he approached it with a certain amount of deference. He was too civilised, or too sceptical about all things supernatural, to sing and dance round it, as did his benighted progenitors, and he would no more have thought of sprinkling our tent with the powder of the "buchu" in its honour, than he would have of sacrificing two sheep to it; unless they were sheep belonging to some other person, and then only with a

view to a snake-like gorge. Still, he half believed that the advent of the mantis was indicative of future prosperity, and he would not have treated it with disrespect for fear of bringing ill-luck upon himself.

My acquaintance with Piet began curiously. He was one of the drivers of the Diamond Fields transport waggons, and was employed on a stage between Victoria West and Hopetown. He came to us at a farm, some ten hours' journey from the former town, with a span of twelve half-starved mules, which were so wretchedly bad that he and the other driver had to take it in turns to run alongside them and keep them moving by a vigorous application of "sjambok." He would jump out and administer a couple of stinging cuts to each mule, and then, as they broke into a trot, he would spring on to the waggon again. He did this very cleverly some five or six times; but he tried it once too often, and, missing his footing, fell under the waggon, so that the heavy wheels passed over an ankle and crushed it. We of course stopped, lifted him into the waggon, bandaged his ankle with strips of rag damped with "Cape Smoke" and water taken from the collective flasks of the passengers, and then, in order that there might be room enough in the waggon to admit of his lying down, some of us walked on.

At the next farm we reached—some ten miles beyond the scene of the accident—the charitable Boer refused to allow us to leave the boy there, on the grounds that he was "only a nigger." He furthermore expressed an opinion that we were fools not to have left him lying in the "veldt" to take care of himself, and burst into roars of laughter, when he learned that some of us had actually been walking on the boy's account. In consequence, we now had to take the wounded "Tottie" fifteen miles further on, to the next farm-house, where his own master lived; and he had to put up with the pain caused by the jolting of the waggon for another two hours. The distance was too great for any of us to walk, as we should have been left too far behind the waggon; so we squeezed in as best we could, and drove on.

At midnight we reached the farm, and, to our surprise and disgust, the boy's master, an Englishman, only repeated the advice which had been given to us at the last halting-place by the Boer, applying to us, in addition, various uncomplimentary

epithets suggestive of our want of sanity. He had Piet dragged out of the waggon; cursed him for an awkward fool; threatened to have him flogged for each day that he was deprived of his services; and finally announced his intention of turning him out in the "veldt" in a week, should he not have recovered by that time.

We went on again about three in the morning, leaving Piet in the hands of this Samaritan; and the incident was soon forgotten, until about two months later, when as I was sitting with my partner D— outside our little frame tent, on the dusty plain of the New Rush, Piet suddenly dropped upon us, asking for work. He recognised me at once; said that his master had turned him out, as he had threatened to do; and added that, as I had already done something for him, it was my duty to do something more.

It happened that we wanted a cook and general factotum at that time, so we engaged him on the spot; and we never had any reason to complain of our bargain, for he stole far less from us than any other native we ever employed. Of this strange moderation in peculation, however, we of course knew nothing when he came to us; and, indeed, our principal reason for engaging him was, that he understood a little English, a rare accomplishment amongst the natives of the western province of the old colony, who almost invariably speak Dutch. He had probably learned what he knew at his last place; and, though it is true that his English was not very good, it was far better than our Dutch, and we contrived to understand each other without difficulty.

Notwithstanding his scepticism, Piet had prejudices. One evening, after a dusty day's work at the sorting-table, I wandered down a "donga," out by the low hills towards the Vaal, with my gun, to try and shoot a coran or something for supper. I saw no corans, but I shot a hare, some of which we ate, and told Piet that he might have what remained. He was usually voracious enough; but this time he made a grimace indicative of repugnance, and gravely announced that he wanted something else, as he could not eat hare.

For some time he would not tell us what objection he had to that animal, but after much urging he told us the following tradition:

"The moon comes, by-and-by it dies, and then it comes to life again. The moon once called the hare, and said to him:

'Go to men, and tell them that, as I die and come to life again, so shall they also die and come to life again.' The hare went accordingly as he was told, and when he returned the moon asked him: 'What did you say?' The hare replied: 'I have told them that as you die and come not to life again, so shall they also die and come not to life again.' 'What,' said the moon, 'did you say that?' And being angry, he took up a stick, and hit the hare on the mouth, which became slit."

Therefore, according to Piet, no Hottentot will eat hare, because he brought the wrong message, and was thus the cause of death.

The Zulus have a legend analogous to this, but with different "dramatis personæ." According to their version, the "Umkulunkulu," or Deity, sent a chameleon to tell men that they should not die. The chameleon, however, went slowly, and stopped on the road to eat the leaves of a certain shrub. In the meantime the "Umkulunkulu" changed his mind, and sent the "intulwa," a species of lizard, to overtake the chameleon, and tell men that they must die. The "intulwa" set out, passed the chameleon, and arriving first at the place where the men were, told them that they must die.

D—— kept a thermometer hung up on a nail which was driven into one of the ridge-poles of the tent, and the mercury in the tube and bowl much exercised the mind of Piet. He asked us frequently what it was for, and evidently regarded our explanations as to the use of the instrument as mere subterfuges designed to disguise the truth, asking:

"What the use of such ting? S'pose I see cloud dis side over dar, den me know rain soon catch dis part, and make plenty cold. S'pose you no able for tell if day hot or cold without dem ting?"

The word "mercury," too, he considered a slang name we had invented to describe the metal in the bowl; and one day, when D—— happened to refer to it as "quick-silver" in Piet's presence, I could see a sudden gleam of intelligence in the boy's eyes, and a pleased expression on his flat countenance, as if he had at last received corroborative evidence of a fact which he had long suspected. Next day we came back from the claim somewhat earlier than was our custom on account of the unusual heat, and when D—— went, as usual, towards the thermometer to see what the temperature was, behold, no thermometer was there!

We, of course, suspected Piet at once, and searched high and low for him. He was nowhere near our tent, but after some time we discovered him at a little distance, crouched down behind a heap of "stuff" near a sorting-table, busily engaged with something on the ground. We approached him on tip-toe, and beheld an amusing sight. Before him on the ground lay the broken thermometer, and beside it, in the dust, was a glistening little silver globule of mercury. Piet's eyes were fastened upon this with a mingled expression of amazement and fright. Every now and then he would cautiously extend a finger and thumb and endeavour to pick up the mercury, which naturally escaped him, and rolled to one side. His action and expression each time he found he had missed it were so absurd, that at last we could not restrain our laughter; he at once heard us, looked round, and the next moment was dancing about and making grimaces at us two hundred yards off.

It was not until the pangs of hunger compelled him, towards the evening, to approach the tent, that we caught him. He expressed contrition, but seemed to think, at the same time, that we had played rather a shabby trick on him.

"What for you tell me that silver live in dem ting for?" he asked. "Why you no say it witchcraft, and then I leff him. That no good silver—not money silver."

Piet pretended to have a great affection for me, and I have no doubt he liked me better than he did D——, for I was far too lenient with him. I went away once for four days to Pniel to bathe in the river and try to become clean, for I had been sleeping in my boots, on the earth, for more than four weeks, and had only been able, such was the scarcity of water, to wash once during that period. When I returned, Piet greeted me with open arms. I asked him how he had been getting on in my absence, and he answered: "Oh, well enough, baas. I cry for you all time. I miss you plenty, and when I no see you, I go smell your coat." If strength of perfume afforded him any satisfaction, he must have got plenty out of that old coat, for it was mud-stained, dirty, and sun-scorched to the last degree.

Some four months after we had taken Piet into our service, my partner and I decided to leave the diamond fields and try our luck at the Transvaal gold diggings. Several causes induced us to come to this decision. The expenses of working a claim

at the New Rush were exceedingly heavy, amounting to at least fifty pounds a month; and, though one might at any time come upon a diamond worth several thousand pounds, which would well repay one for all advances made to fortune, and even make amends for the hard life, discomfort, and hard labour; yet, on the other hand, as had persistently happened in our own case, one might only find, month after month, inferior stones, splints and "boart," which would hardly pay for working the claim. At that time, too, marvellous tales were afloat as to the richness of Pilgrim's Rest in alluvial gold—how one man had hit upon a "pocket" containing nearly four hundred ounces; how another had taken two pounds' weight of nuggets out of the stream in one afternoon, by simply turning over boulders and rocks, and searching under them, and so on.

At all events having worked off and recovered from the diamond fever, we took the gold fever; and it happening that an "up-country" trader in ostrich feathers and ivory was going north through the Transvaal, we sold our claim at the New Rush, and arranged with him to carry our few belongings as far as our two roads lay in common. Everything being completed, we left Du Toit's Pan early one morning and struck into the road which traverses the Middleveld, and leads in a north-easterly direction through a sparsely settled district of the Orange Free State, past Kopje Alleyne, to the town of Potchefstroom, in the Transvaal.

Two days out from Bashof we outspanned in the "veldt" near the Vet River, a tributary of the Vaal, close to a "donga" which contained a few pools of water from recent rains. On these high inland plateaus an astonishingly cold blast whistles over the earth at night, and we gladly huddled round the fire which the "boys" had lighted for us, their own being, as usual, at some little distance; and watched Piet frying some springbok cutlets and boiling the coffee. Our supper over we lighted our pipes, and, wrapped in our "karosses," lay down to smoke and talked. The wind blew colder and colder, and we were all agreed that the situation was most unsatisfactory. If we lay with our feet to the fire, our heads were numbed by the blast; to lie with our heads to the blaze was out of the question; and if we lay sideways, one side was roasted while the other was frozen. Thick as was my sheep-skin "kaross" I soon decided that uncomfortable as was the

interior of the waggon, encumbered as it was with barrels and wooden cases, it would be desirable to seek that shelter. The trader shared my opinion, and we climbed in and disposed ourselves to the best advantage on the angular heap; while D——, who was more luxurious, and objected to any couch harder than the earth, strolled off to a clump of low bushes which grew near the "donga" at a distance of some forty yards, with the intention of lying down under their shelter. Hard as was my bed, the fatigue of the day—for we had walked many miles and had been up since daybreak—soon brought about its natural results. For a few minutes I heard the flapping of the waggon tilt in the breeze, the chatter of the "boys" around their fire, and the yelping of a distant pack of jackals, and then fell asleep.

I had been sleeping for about two hours, when I was awakened by a great squealing and commotion amongst the mules. This was followed by a snarl, which, limited as was then my experience, I had no difficulty in at once recognising as that of a leopard. Taking from the hooks on which it was hung, my gun, a wretched article of Belgian manufacture which I had purchased at Cape Town, and which had the left barrel rifled, I jumped out of the waggon and saw Piet and the other boys busily employed in throwing blazing ox-chips from the fire towards the clumps of bushes whence the squealing and snarling proceeded. It seemed that the mules, being of the same opinion as D——, had also sought the shelter of the bushes to escape the wind, and a leopard, stealing up the "donga," had sprung upon one; for in a few seconds, D—— and a crowd of mules appeared on the plain. He told us that he had been aroused by a mule trampling on him; that at the instant of waking, he had seen a leopard spring at the shoulder of the very beast that was treading upon him; that the mule, being knee-haltered, had fallen on him; and that he had escaped from the *mêlée* considerably the worse for bruises. He dilated upon the cat-like motions and green-glistening eyes of the leopard, and endeavoured to impress upon us that he had had a very narrow escape indeed. We believed as much of this as we pleased, and lighting bunches of rhinoster bush, went towards the scene of the conflict. The leopard had not, of course, waited to be interviewed; but we found the mule alive, literally kicking, and terribly mauled. It would be of no use for draught

purposes for some weeks, and the trader, filled with fury, vowed that as soon as daylight permitted, he would follow up and settle scores with the enemy. We applauded this resolution, for although we had already on one or two occasions lain out at night to watch for leopards, we had not yet succeeded in shooting one, and we were anxious to establish our reputations.

Immediately after daybreak then, we descended into the "donga." Each of us Europeans had a rifle, and Piet accompanied us with an old fowling-piece loaded with slugs. He was full of confidence, and bragged about what he would do should he come across the leopard. Two of the traders' "boys," both Ama-Swazis, and good hands at picking up "spoor," led the van. The bottom of the "donga" was about fifteen feet below the level of the plain, and about forty yards wide where we entered it. In parts, where the scour had been great, the walls were perpendicular and bare; but generally they were broken up by smaller "dongas," opening to the right and left into the plain.

The two Kaffirs, after a moment or two of hesitation, turned their backs upon the river into which the "donga" discharged, and advanced slowly up the latter. At first, the bed consisted of sand and loose stones, with here and there a tangle of uprooted mimosa and tall Tambookie grass; but as we proceeded, the vegetation became thicker. Our advance was somewhat slow, as each lateral "donga" had to be searched before we could pass its mouth, and at the end of an hour we were still only a quarter of a mile from the outspan. We were moving cautiously along, when a hare leaped suddenly from its form and bolted between D——'s legs, nearly causing him to fire his rifle in his alarm. Piet's face at once became downcast. "Bess for turn back," he said to me, "or some person go die this day." It was the apparition of the hare, the messenger of death to man, which put this idea into his head, and we told him he could go back if he liked; but he seemed ashamed to appear afraid, and followed on.

A quarter of a mile further up the "donga" we were pushing through some tall grass that reached to our hips, when we saw the grass at some little distance in front swaying about as though some animal were passing through it. "Pas op," ("Look out"), cried the Kaffirs, as they threw a handful of stones at the spot where the grass was in motion; and the

next moment, a leopard gracefully leapt over the grass and disappeared round the angle in the "donga." D—— and the trader both took snap-shots as he went, and both apparently missed. At all events, we were now sure that we were upon the right track, and we followed up eagerly. The "donga" had now narrowed to some ten yards in breadth, and the bed was much choked with thorns and rocks, so that we could only move on with difficulty; but there was no exit except the way by which we had come, and we felt certain of our quarry.

After about another quarter of an hour the leading Kaffir stopped, gesticulated to the trader, and pointed towards a ledge of rock which projected from one wall of the "donga," about ten feet from the bed, and which was thickly covered with bush and heath. We could see nothing at first, but the quick eyes of the Ama-Swazi had discovered the hiding-place of the enemy, through a few inches of exposed tail which protruded from the cover. After a few seconds' consultation it was decided that D—— and I should fire at that spot which ought to conceal the animal's body, while the trader reserved his fire in case ours should not prove fatal.

Our two rifles exploded simultaneously, the bushes were violently agitated, a loud screech echoed down the "donga," and before we could think what to do the wounded leopard was amongst us. I threw myself to one side, so as to give him plenty of room to pass me, but fortunately he did not come in my direction. All I could see was a yellowish brown object shoot through the air, and the next moment poor Piet was down on his back and the leopard on top of him. I could hear a horrible crunching and growling, and the hind legs of the leopard seemed to be working like those of a cat when it is scratching up the ground. My right barrel was loaded with slugs, but I could not fire without hitting the boy, and for the same reason the trader was unable to do anything. A sudden movement of the leopard, however, gave the latter a chance; for he at once fired, and with a strange sound, something between a cough and a sob, the animal fell, quivering in every limb. All this had occupied but a very few seconds.

We approached cautiously, for there still might be life in the creature; but he was really dead, and we dragged the carcase off Piet, who was lying underneath. The boy was living, but terribly wounded.

We saw at once that there was no hope. Piet tried to smile as I bent over him, but succeeded but feebly :

"I tell you some person go die this day," he said. "All same that hare, liar hare. He run against the baas, not 'gainst me. Baas proper man for die. Gimme drop o' drink."

And with these words on his lips he died.

UNCLE BOB'S NIECE.

By LESLIE KEITH.

Author of "*The Chilcotes*," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was to be a preliminary investigation of the boarding-house—a sort of trial trip—before the travellers finally decided on casting in their lot with it; and for this purpose they set out one day, a week or so after Honoria's departure.

The week had not been lost by Honoria. She had diligently sown seeds of preparation and expectation in the hearts of her fellow boarders, and she had duly impressed the proprietress, Madame Drave, with the wealth of her new clients.

Boarders were divided by this lady into three orders. First and foremost, that rare and delightful creature who takes the best rooms, who pays without murmuring the highest prices, and does not cavil at extras. The only drawback to this charming guest is the circumstance that he is apt to depart with the same sudden unexpectedness with which he came; to take his compliance and his wealth elsewhere. Next in value to what may be termed the Casual Boarder, is the Permanency; the man or woman who pays, if not so well, yet still well, for accommodation of a simpler order, and who may be counted on, summer and winter, to stay. If the Permanency rushes off at Christmas, or Easter, or Midsummer, he takes but a portmanteau with him; he leaves his ornaments and pictures upon his walls; his boots, even his slippers, are left behind, for he is sure to return. With the last hour of his holiday he once more appears. He hangs his hat in the hall; he slips into his familiar seat. The Permanency, who is no lover of change, is therefore well worth securing.

Third in order comes the Cheap Boarder, the boarder who pays scantily, but who eats little, and is content to fare hardily. Sometimes he is a young man who is

absent all day, and who expects nothing but tea on his return; sometimes she is a girl-governess who works equally hard, and whom the stress of life has left with but a languid appetite. Poor Cheap Boarder! banished to the top of the house; deprived of a wardrobe, sometimes of a carpet; stinted in the matter of soap, of hot water, of towels, of blankets; expected to have a taste for none but the plainest dishes; and never, on any occasion whatever, permitted to ring the bell—surely it is but the seamy side of life that is turned towards his melancholy gaze.

Yarrow House, Madame Drave's establishment, held members of all three orders. It was very select; so select, indeed, that there was but one City man in the house, and he was there on sufferance, as it were, occupying a little room not easily let, and also because—if the paradox may be permitted—he was frequently not there, being absent in the interests of silk or tea. A Major and his wife occupied the front bed-room on the second floor, and a literary man and his helpmeet the back. There was also a lady-novelist, who sat with inky assiduity, for the greater part of the day in her own chamber. There was, moreover, the widow of a clergyman who would have been made a Canon if he had lived; and a young man who had means, and luxuriated in idleness, with his name on the books of two Clubs.

In the upper regions there lived by herself a pale young art-student, who gave lessons when she could secure pupils; and a youth who was supposed by those who took the trouble to enquire—but nobody does enquire much about the cheap boarder—to be in a Bank. The glory of the first floor, with its handsome furniture and its high-art decorations, was reserved for Tilly and her uncle.

Miss Walton, who might be regarded as a Permanency, though she lodged a half-flight of steps higher than the Major and the literary man, had a pleasant little room overlooking the street. That street—to be not too precise, in case any particular boarding-house should feel affronted—was Broad Street, South Kensington.

In setting forth the attractions of her house in the daily prints, Madame Drave always mentioned that it was close to South Kensington Museum. The Museum appears to have a particular fascination for boarders; to judge by the advertisements, one would come to the conclusion that they are its chief visitors. She also

allowed that it was near Hyde Park; but this information was generally printed in smaller type, and was for the consolation of the frivolous. In like manner, while the proximity of the station was duly recorded, that plebeian vehicle, the omnibus, was never mentioned in any prospectus of Madame Drave's. Omnibuses are the resource of the vulgar, and Madame's "guests" were all highly genteel. If they did not roll about in carriages, they had friends who did, and when they travelled on the Underground, it was understood that they took first-class tickets.

It was then to this establishment, thus outlined, that Tilly and her uncle were driving, one bright day, shortly before Christmas. They journeyed by way of the Brompton Road, which Tilly immediately recognised. Not a feature of it escaped her; she had thought that it concentrated in itself all the glories of London on that day—so long ago, as it seemed—when she had stepped out of the omnibus at Sloane Street, and had walked towards Mrs. Popham and disappointment.

There was that milliner's with the bonnets which had then seemed tempting, and there—yes, there was the shop where Uncle Bob had courted indigestion by his rash consumption of pie, and where Mr. Nameless had come upon the scene.

For Mr. Burton, too, the quarter appeared to have memories, for he looked about him curiously.

"I seem to know my bearings hereabouts," he said. "Have we been here before, lass? Or, is it only that one street is as like another as two peas? A fellow would need to blaze the houses to find his way about."

"We've been here before," she said, not anxious by too great precision to awaken memories of Mrs. Popham. "I wonder if we have far to go?"

They had not far, as it turned out. Broad Street stands a little apart from the busy thoroughfare, and it looks upon the silence of a garden, green for but a brief summer, but affording a sense of breathing-space even in mid-winter.

Here, from her post by the window, Honoria saw the carriage—an open one—swinging round the corner. Two figures were on the back seat, and—yes, on the narrow one facing Tilly, the inevitable Behrens.

"What does he want?" she exclaimed with a little gesture of anger, as she came downstairs to meet her friends. "Is he

afraid to trust them out of his sight for a moment?"

Perhaps the idle boarder—the young man of abundant leisure—was peeping from the dining-room window, while Honoria kept watch above, for Tilly's beauty as well as her uncle's wealth had been rumoured in Yarrow House, and a little thrill and bustle of expectation went through all its floors as the horses were reined in at the door.

The wife of the literary man, who was carefully copying one of his manuscripts, contented herself with wondering and conjecturing; but the widow of the clergyman was met—quite by accident—upon the stair, as the little party was ushered up it. Mr. Burton would not have taken it amiss, for his part, if the entire household had lined the hall to greet Tilly. It was Tilly who came first in his mind. He was in a complacent humour, taking the name of the house—which was emblazoned on the glass panel above the door—as an appropriate compliment to his nationality, and prepared to be pleased.

He shook hands quite cordially with Honoria when she had a moment to spare him from Tilly. As for Mr. Behrens, she gave him but the tips of her fingers to shake.

"Do you want rooms, too, Mr. Behrens?" she asked. "I'm afraid there are none unoccupied that would be good enough for you. You wouldn't care to be banished to the top regions, like poor me."

"Behrens has come to take a look round," said Mr. Burton, answering for him. "Three minds are better than two. And now, whose room may this be?"

"This is the drawing-room, where we all meet in the evening, if we like, you know, and have music, or dancing, or cards. Of course you would have a private sitting-room as well. Oh, here comes Mdme. Drave. Perhaps you would like to talk matters over with her? That would be best, wouldn't it?"

She made the introductions, and then she seized on Tilly.

"Come, and I'll show you the house while your uncle and his mentor are settling things," she whispered, carrying Tilly off, nothing loth.

They went upstairs together, Honoria pausing with an uplifted finger at the first door in the corridor.

"This," she whispered, "is where Mr. and Mrs. Sherrington live. He is literary; writes for the drier sort of journals and

papers. I believe they have two rooms. His wife is just the very best little woman in creation. She does all his copying for him, and she believes him the very greatest genius in London. Listen! he is dictating to her now."

They both held their breath, and in the pause of their silence a deep, melodious, and rather melancholy voice was heard, with more or less distinctness, as the speaker paced the room:

"Alcaics (comma), sapphics (comma), asclepiads of various kinds (comma), are, we venture to think (comma), unwarrantably employed—unwarrantably or mistakenly? Stop, Milly, let me consider."

"What is it all about?" murmured Tilly, puzzled and impressed as they stole away, leaving Mr. Sherrington to settle the important question of expression.

"I don't know," answered Honoria indifferently. "I sometimes think he doesn't either. But he has a good wife and a pretty one too! These are the quarters of Major and Mrs. Drew." She indicated another door. "They call it their bungalow. They also have two rooms; they have their own furniture—camp furniture they had in India. Everything they possess folds up and goes into something else. Very convenient for travelling; but it makes sitting down rather an anxious affair, since you don't know but what your chair may take it into its head to turn into a set of steps or a clothes screen. They are out, I know. I might show you their sitting-room. You would rather wait? Well, perhaps as Mrs. Drew is very proud of her contrivances, it would be better to let her act showwoman herself."

"Oh, here is Miss Dicey!" ran on Honoria, who was in wonderful spirits. "Good afternoon, Miss Dicey; it isn't often one sees you at this hour of the day."

"Well, no," replied Miss Dicey, who was small, and spare, and rather faded. "I'm generally busy; but I find I have to run across to the post. Won't you come in? My room is dreadfully untidy, but still"—she looked at Tilly, who was beautiful enough for the heroine of some romance—"do come in," she urged.

"Wouldn't detain you for the world," said Honoria, lightly. "We know how valuable your time is. I am only showing my friend the house."

"I never saw a person who wrote books before," said Tilly, gazing after the small, active figure of Miss Dicey, as it vanished

down the corridor. "Does Miss Dicey really write novels?"

"Yes, and they're great fun. We all get hold of them; though I don't believe any one in the house reads a word Mr. Sherrington writes, except his wife. This is the last room on this floor, you see, and it belongs to Mrs. Moxon; you met her on the stair? It was just like Mrs. Moxon to be on the stair."

"Who was the young man at the window below?" questioned Tilly. "A young man with an eye-glass."

"Oh, that must have been Mr. Runciman. I believe he must have stopped at home on purpose to see you! He is our ornamental young man; there is a working one downstairs and another in the garret."

"Runciman is a Scotch name."

"I don't think he's Scotch, but I daresay he will be anxious to believe it if you tell him so," Honoria laughed. "Now, come up to my den; I hope it will soon be a very familiar place to you. Yes, it isn't a bad little room—quite as good as I have any right to expect, and some of its comforts I owe to you, my dear."

"How can that be?" questioned Tilly, looking about her.

"The answer is very simple. I recommended you, so I am rather a favourite with Madame at present."

"Is she that sort of person?" Tilly's voice had an edge of disgust.

"She is a just person on the whole, and means to deal fairly, I daresay; but she is human, and a good boarder is worth securing, even at the expense of a little flattery. Perhaps it is mean of me to accept bribes, but poverty makes one mean. This wardrobe, you see, is a better one than usually falls to a permanency. It has two wings and a glass in the centre. One wing and no glass is the usual allowance. And this easy-chair—I never had an easy-chair before; if you don't come, it will doubtless disappear."

"If we don't come, you shall have another to replace it," Tilly said gravely, but she felt uncomfortable. She felt still more uncomfortable, when they went up to the top of the house—that bare region which the young Bank clerk and the young Art student shared with the working housekeeper and servants.

The door of the artist's room was wide open, showing all the poverty and shabbiness of the interior.

"She is very poor, I believe," explained Honoria. "She has a stove, you see,

because that is cheaper than a fire, and she only lights it at night. The young man who occupies the prophet's chamber up that small flight of steps is almost equally poor, I believe. We see very little of either of them."

Of all the house, this upper region was the part that impressed Tilly most. Its poor restrictions haunted her even when she descended and was examining the handsome first-floor suite with her uncle.

"What do you think, Tilly?" he asked, drawing her aside, "here's this room for you to sit in when you want to sew your tuckers or read a story-book"—these were his ideas of a young lady's occupations—"and where I can smoke a pipe now and then and take a look at the papers. And this is your room and dressing-room. No, no, my lass; the other is good enough for me. What do you think? As Behrens says, it's for you to choose. I've pledged myself to nothing; and, if it's a question of a week's or a month's leave to be off with this Madam, that's easy settled."

"But I think it will do very well," said Tilly gravely, remembering with shame that gaunt garret she had just left. "If you think of my room at the Manse, Uncle Bob—"

"Aye, but we've changed all that," he said emphatically. "You're a lady now, my lass, and you must have the best that money can buy."

"I couldn't want better than this. We'll settle which room you are to have later. Perhaps we ought to go now; Mr. Behrens may be in a hurry."

Mr. Behrens did not appear to be in a hurry. He stood with his usual air of grave unconcern while the final arrangements were made and the day fixed for the arrival, and he even found words of congratulation for Miss Walton as they went downstairs.

"You have triumphed," he said smilingly; "it must have given you sincere pleasure that your attractions have, as they deserved, proved irresistible."

"I am very glad to have my friends here," said Honoria tranquilly, sustained by a sense of victory, "but of course I

can't expect to monopolise them, they will make so many new friends! You will be here very often, I suppose, Mr. Behrens? Every day, perhaps? What a pity Madame could not find room for you, to save you the fatigue of coming so often!"

Mr. Behrens laughed, actually laughed, as he shook her unwilling hand.

"I would not for worlds seem to reject your sympathy," he said; "but allow me to reassure you, my dear young lady. Madame could have found room and would have found it, had I wished to try your charming boarding-house."

He left her as she went upstairs with a sense of depression that hardly belongs to the victorious. It was true, and she knew it. This silent, unconcerned Behrens could have been a formidable opponent if he chose. Why did he not choose?

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